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I think every pilot needs to have compelling characters, a compelling story, compelling dialogue, and a great opening.

—Shonda Rhimes

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CHAPTER RECAP

Without a compelling pilot, you don't have a TV show. Pilots are crucial for hooking an audience and setting up your characters and storyline for an entire season.

Shonda suggests you pick a character that will function as the audience's guide in the pilot. He or she will help introduce the characters and the world of your show without causing viewers to be bogged down with excessive or conspicuous exposition. In *Grey's Anatomy*, the interns served this purpose. For *Scandal*, it was Quinn.

Though pilots vary greatly from show to show, successful ones all have something in common: a fantastic opening. Your pilot needs an opening that is going to grab your viewers, and says something important to your audience about the show they are going to watch. Shonda uses the example of *Scandal's* opening scene, and how she went through the process of writing three alternative scenes. This is the same care you should take when deciding on the opening scene for your show: really think through what your opening scene is and what effect it will leave on the audience.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- What is the best pilot you've watched? The worst? Become a diagnostician again, and watch three pilot episodes of your choice. Be aware of how they engage (or lose you) right off the bat. How does the show explain the world and its characters? Is there a character that guides the audience? Does the ending leave you wanting more? Discuss some of your favorite and least favorite pilots with your classmates in The Hub.

SUBCHAPTERS

- ▶ The Opening and Ending Scenes Are Key
- ▶ There Are No Wrong Choices
- ▶ Create a Character Who Guides the Audience
- ▶ Case Study: The Opening Scene of *Scandal*

NOTES

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SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION 26

ASSIGNMENT

- Like Shonda did for the *Scandal* pilot, write out four different opening scenes for your pilot. Experiment with showcasing different characters in the opening scene, and using alternative ways to introduce your main character. Now, select the one that you think is best. Upload a PDF of the opening scene to MasterClass's Rate and Review tool to receive feedback from your classmates.

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